

# OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)



## in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) NSLP (including the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)). It allows students to decline a certain number of food components in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste. OVS must be implemented at lunch in senior high schools but is optional for all other grades.

### Overview of OVS at Lunch

OVS applies to the **daily** meal pattern requirements. Schools must **offer** all five food components in at least the minimum daily amounts. For a reimbursable lunch, students must **select** at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving (minimum daily amount) of at least two other food components. A **food component** is one of the five food groups that comprise the reimbursable lunch (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meat/meat alternates). A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five food components. For example, a hamburger (meat/meat alternates component) on a whole-grain bun (grains component) is one food item that contains two components.

The chart below summarizes the daily meal pattern requirements and the number of food components that students can decline under OVS at lunch. These requirements apply to all grade groups.

| OVS Requirements at Lunch   |  |
|---|--|
| Must Offer Five Components <sup>1</sup>   | Student May Decline  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One serving of <b>milk</b> <sup>2</sup></li><li>• One serving of <b>fruits</b></li><li>• One serving of <b>vegetables</b></li><li>• One serving of <b>grains</b></li><li>• One serving of <b>meat/meat alternates</b></li></ul>    | One or two food components but must take <b>at least <math>\frac{1}{2}</math> cup</b> of fruits or vegetables<br> |
| <p><sup>1</sup> Serving sizes for each grade group must be at least the minimum daily required quantities in the NSLP meal pattern. The menu planner determines the daily serving size to meet the required weekly amounts for each component.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Schools must offer at least two different varieties (fat content and/or flavor) of unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk. Whole, reduced-fat (2%), and flavored low-fat milk cannot be served.</p> |  |

For a lunch to be reimbursable under OVS, schools must meet the criteria below.

- Menus must be planned to meet the NSLP meal pattern. All five food components must be offered to all students in at least the minimum daily serving. For information on the lunch meal pattern, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.
- Except for fluid milk, the food components may be offered in more than one food item. Meat/meat alternates may only be offered as a main dish (one food item) or a main dish and one other food item (two food items).
- The planned serving size for all food components must be at least the minimum daily serving for each grade group. Larger amounts may be served if the weekly menu does not exceed the limits for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.
- Meals must be priced as a unit, i.e., students pay the same price regardless of whether they take three, four, or five food components.



## OVS IN THE NSLP, continued

- Students must take at least three of the five food components offered, including at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of at least two other food components.
- Students may decline any one or two food components except for at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruits or vegetables. Student selections of less than the minimum daily serving do not credit toward the reimbursable meal.
- Schools may allow students to select more than the minimum daily serving of any component. Student selections of additional servings from the same component credit as only one component toward the reimbursable meal. For example, a lunch for grades 9-12 provides 3 ounce equivalents (oz eq) of grains from 1 cup of brown rice (2 oz eq) and a 1-ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq). If a student selects both items, they credit as only one component (grains).
- If the menu offers the minimum daily serving as two separate food items, students must take both items to credit as one component for OVS. The chart below shows some examples.



| Offering Minimum Daily Component as Two Food Items |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Meal Component and Minimum Daily Amount            | Planned Menu Items   | Required Student Selection for Full Component (Minimum Daily Serving)  |
| <b>GRADES K-5 AND 6-8</b>                          |  |  |
| <b>Fruits (F)</b><br>$\frac{1}{2}$ cup             | $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of peaches<br>$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of grapes  | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of F. Students could select only $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of F if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of V and two other full components.   |
| <b>Vegetables (V)</b><br>$\frac{3}{4}$ cup         | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of carrots<br>$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of tomatoes  | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of V. Students could select only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of carrots if they also select two other full components, one of which could be $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F. Students could select only $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of tomatoes if they also select at least $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of F and two other full components. |
| <b>Meat/Meat Alternates (M/MA)</b><br>1 oz eq      | 1 tablespoon of peanut butter ( $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq)<br>$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of yogurt ( $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq) | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of M/MA. Students could select either the peanut butter or yogurt alone if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.  |
| <b>Grains (G)</b><br>1 oz eq                       | Two packages of whole-grain crackers ( $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq each)   | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of G. Students could select only one package of crackers if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.   |
| <b>GRADES 9-12</b>                                 |  |  |
| <b>F</b><br>1 cup                                  | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of peaches<br>$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of grapes  | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of F. Students could select only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F if they also select two other full components, one of which could be 1 cup of V.   |
| <b>V</b><br>1 cup                                  | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of green peppers<br>$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of tomatoes  | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of V. Students could select only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of V if they also select two other full components, one of which could be 1 cup of F.   |
| <b>M/MA</b><br>2 oz eq                             | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of low-fat yogurt (1 oz eq)<br>1 ounce low-fat cheese stick (1 oz eq)                    | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of M/MA. Students could select either the yogurt or cheese alone if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.   |
| <b>G</b><br>2 oz eq                                | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of whole grain-rich pasta (1 oz eq)<br>1 ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq)                | Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of G. Students could select either the pasta or roll alone if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.   |

## OVS IN THE NSLP, continued

### Examples of OVS at Lunch

For a reimbursable lunch, students must select at least three of the five food components offered, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of two other components. The charts below show OVS examples for each grade group.



| Examples of OVS for Grades K-5 and 6-8  |                                      |  |                         |  |                                   |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Planned Lunch   | Meal Components and Amounts Provided | Student Selects  | Food Items <sup>1</sup> | Full Food Components <sup>2</sup><br>(Minimum Daily Serving) | Plus at least<br>½ cup of F or V? | REIMBURSABLE MEAL?   |
|   |                                      |  |                         | MUST BE<br>AT LEAST TWO                                      | MUST BE<br>“YES”                  |  |
| Turkey (2 ounces) sandwich on whole-wheat bread (2 slices)  | M/MA, 2 oz eq<br>G, 2 oz eq          | Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G)<br>Milk (M)  | 2                       | 3  | No                                | No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.  |
| Broccoli florets (¾ cup) with low-fat dip   | V, ¾ cup                             | Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G)<br>Apple (F)                                       | 2                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and F).   |
| Whole fresh apple, ½ cup  | F, ½ cup                             | Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G)<br>Broccoli (V)                                    | 2                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and V).   |
| Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)   | Milk (M), 1 cup                      | Broccoli (V)<br>Apple (F)<br>Milk (M)  | 3                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains three full components (V, F, and M).  |
|   |                                      | Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G)<br>Apple (F)<br>Milk (M)                           | 3                       | 4  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains four full components (M/MA, G, F, and M).   |
| Cheeseburger (1 ½ ounces of cooked beef and ½ ounce of cheese) on whole-grain bun   | M/MA, 2 oz eq<br>G, 2 oz eq          | Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G)<br>Milk (M)                                    | 2                       | 3  | No                                | No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.  |
| Lettuce and tomato (¼ cup)<br>Carrot sticks (½ cup)   | V, ¾ cup                             | Cheeseburger without bun (M/MA)<br>Carrot sticks (V)<br>Milk (M)             | 3                       | 2  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and M) and includes ½ cup of V.   |
| Green apple (½ cup)   | F, ½ cup                             | Lettuce/tomato (V) <sup>1</sup><br>Carrot sticks (V)<br>Milk (M)             | 3                       | 2  | Yes                               | No. The meal contains only two full components (V and M). The full ¾-cup serving of V includes ½ cup of carrot sticks and ¼ cup of lettuce/tomato. |
| Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)   | M, 1 cup                             | Carrot sticks (V)<br>Apple (F)<br>Milk (M)                                   | 3                       | 2  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains two full components (F and M) and includes ½ cup of V.  |
|   |                                      | Bun (G)<br>Apple (F)<br>Milk (M)   | 3                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains three full components (G, F and M).   |
|   |                                      | Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G)<br>Lettuce/tomato (V) <sup>1</sup><br>Milk (M) | 3                       | 3  | No                                | No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V. The lettuce/tomato provides ¼ cup of V.      |
| <sup>1</sup> Student selections of less than ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as a component for OVS, unless they are combined with additional servings of fruits or vegetables to meet the minimum requirement. To encourage student selections of reimbursable meals, offer all fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings. |                                      |  |                         |  |                                   |  |

## OVS IN THE NSLP, continued

| Examples of OVS for Grades 9-12  |                                      |   |                         |  |                                   |   |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Planned Lunch  | Meal Components and Amounts Provided | Student Selects   | Food Items <sup>1</sup> | Full Food Components <sup>2</sup><br>(Minimum Daily Serving) | Plus at least<br>½ cup of F or V? | REIMBURSABLE MEAL?  |
|  |                                      |   |                         | MUST BE<br>AT LEAST TWO                                      | MUST BE<br>“YES”                  |   |
| Cheese pizza<br>(2 ounces of cheese,<br>2 ounces of whole grain-rich crust)<br>Tomato sauce on pizza (¼ cup)<br>Coleslaw (¾ cup)<br>Peaches (½ cup)<br>Orange (½ cup)<br>Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)   | M/MA, 2 oz eq<br>G, 2 oz eq          | Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) <sup>1</sup>                                  | 1                       | 2  | No                                | No. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.         |
|  | V, 1 cup                             | Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) <sup>1</sup><br>Peaches (F) <sup>2</sup>      | 2                       | 2  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and F).  |
|  | F, 1 cup                             | Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) <sup>1</sup><br>Coleslaw (V) <sup>2</sup>     | 2                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and V).  |
|  | M, 1 cup                             | Orange (F)<br>Peaches (F)<br>Coleslaw (V) <sup>2</sup>                  | 3                       | 1  | No                                | No. The meal contains only one full component (F) and ¾ cup of V. It is missing another full component. |
| Cheeseburger (1 ½ ounces of cooked beef, ½ ounce of cheese) on whole-grain bun<br>Carrot sticks (1 cup)<br>Strawberries (½ cup)<br>Green grapes (½ cup)<br>Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)   | M/MA, 2 oz eq<br>G, 2 oz eq          | Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G)<br>Low-fat milk (M)                       | 2                       | 3  | No                                | No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G, and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.   |
|  | V, 1 cup                             | Grapes (F) <sup>2</sup><br>Carrot sticks (V)<br>Low-fat milk (M)        | 3                       | 2  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains two full components (V and M) and ½ cup of F.                                    |
|  | F, 1 cup                             | Carrot sticks (V)<br>Strawberries (F) <sup>2</sup><br>Fat-free milk (M) | 3                       | 2  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains two full components (V and M) and includes ½ cup of F.                           |
|  | M, 1 cup                             | Bun (G)<br>Strawberries (F) <sup>2</sup><br>Fat-free milk (M)           | 3                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains two full components (G and M) and includes ½ cup of F.                           |
|  |                                      | Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G)<br>Grapes (F) <sup>2</sup>                | 3                       | 3  | Yes                               | Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) and includes ½ cup of F.                        |
| <sup>1</sup> Student selections of less than ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as a component for OVS, unless they are combined with additional servings of fruits or vegetables to meet the minimum requirement. To encourage student selections of reimbursable meals, offer all fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings.<br><sup>2</sup> Student selections of ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as the full 1-cup component, but they meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Student selections of the minimum daily serving of fruits and vegetables credit <b>once</b> as either the full component or the minimum ½ cup requirement for OVS, but not both in the same meal. |                                      |   |                         |  |                                   |   |



CONNECTICUT STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals](#) and the CSDE's [OVS](#) webpage, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103.

*This handout is available at <http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/OVSNSLP.pdf>.*

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at:

[http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The Connecticut State Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of **race, color, religious creed, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability (including, but not limited to, intellectual disability, past or present history of mental disorder, physical disability or learning disability), genetic information, or any other basis prohibited by Connecticut state and/or federal nondiscrimination laws. The Connecticut State Department of Education does not unlawfully discriminate in employment and licensing against qualified persons with a prior criminal conviction.**

Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Levy Gillespie, Equal Employment Opportunity Director/Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator, Connecticut State Department of Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 607, Hartford, CT 06103, 860-807-2071, [Levy.Gillespie@ct.gov](mailto:Levy.Gillespie@ct.gov).